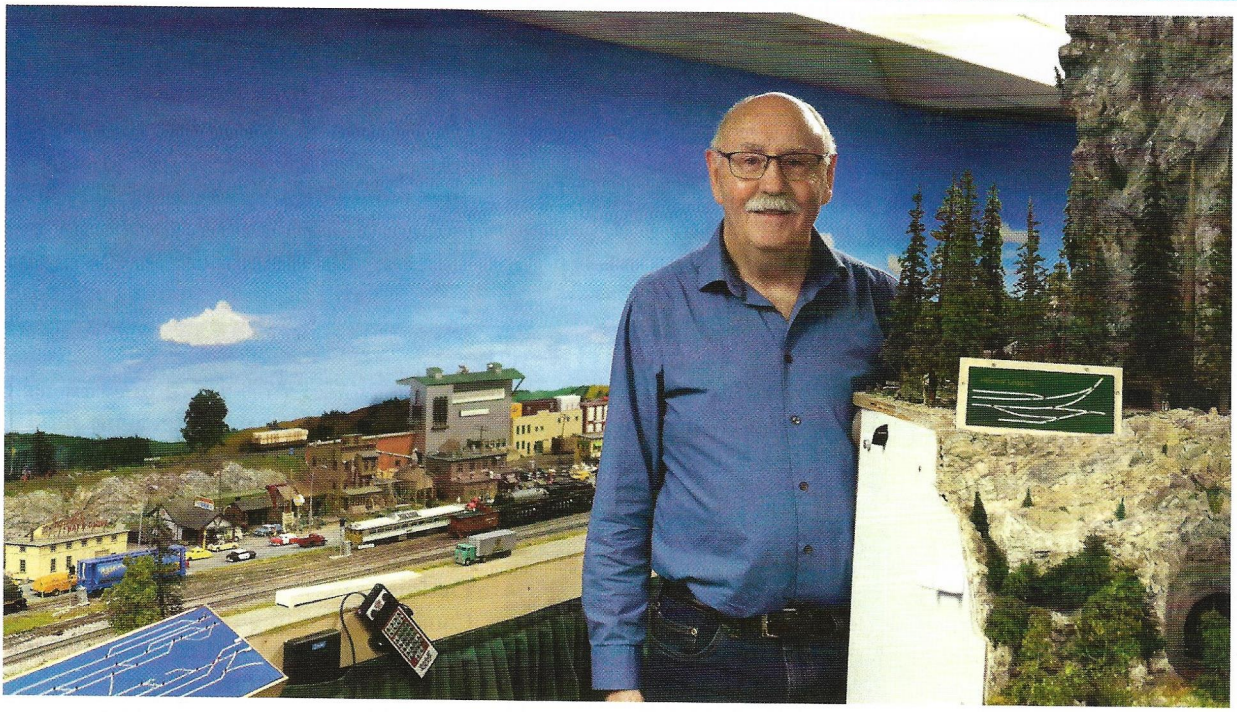

Dennis Dreher

Earns

Master Model Railroader® #766

My journey to model railroading had many twists and turns. Unlike many railroaders, I started this journey late in life, in my mid-40s. Family and career had left very little time for a hobby. It all started when I attended a Hobby Mecca show in Edmonton, Alberta. There were airplanes, racing cars, train layouts, and locomotives with sounds. That was it; I had to find out who, when, and where I could get more information on this hobby. A group of guys told me they were in transition at this show and weren't sure where and when they would be set up. They said to check with the local train stores in Edmonton, and they could advise me of any changes in the near future.

In November 1993, I located an HO layout in Londonderry Mall, and their store was open on Tuesday evenings and weekends. After three months' probation, I became a member of the LaBaJa HO model train group, which was part of the Edmonton Society of Model Railroad Engineers (ESMRE). The ESMRE had Yellowhead HO, Edmonton N-scale, and the LaBaJa HO group — a real train family.

After showing up for a few months, I was asked what part of modeling I wanted to learn and participate in. I foolishly answered, "All of it." I didn't know what I had gotten myself into, but looking back, I was glad because I have gained so much experience and knowledge from this group. LaBaJa model train group attended at least one to three annual train shows for 25 years or more. We participated at the NMRA National Train Show in Sacramento (2011), again in Portland, Oregon (2015), and a Regional in Salmon Arm, British Columbia (2016).

Shortly after my real-work retirement, I took a part-time job at Hobby Wholesale in the train department. Working at the only train store in Edmonton at that time meant I met all the railroad people and club members. At the age of 65, I had enough of working and retired again. Over the years, I made some great friends and contacts.

After more than 25 years of club membership, it was time to break away and attend to my needs. Although I had been working on my layout before, that was when I started seriously working on bridges and the odd scratchbuilt structures. I invited NMRA member Ray Clifford, MMR, over to the layout. After looking at it, he suggested I seriously look into the NMRA's Achievement Program, and he figured I had Scenery, Civil, and Electrical already done. The AP Division manager, Doug Burton, was invited to see the layout, and after a couple of hours, he gave me some pointers and suggestions for the AP. A couple of months later, a Golden Spike certificate hung on my wall. It took another year sitting on the fence, thinking, and avoiding the real question, "Was I afraid of starting this journey to be a 'Master Model Railroader.'?" The answer was obviously "No!"

COVID was a curse and a blessing; it forced me to work at AP Structures and Cars. I had most of the materials in my workshop, and occasionally, I visited Ray Clifford for extra support, advice, and books or magazines.

A close railroad friend, Grant Reierson, opened "The Train Exchange" store in Edmonton and asked me to work and help out when I could. Again, I couldn't say no to that offer. Grant helped me out with items I needed for AP Cars.

Running on home layouts around the Edmonton area gave me dispatch time, plus the opportunity to give Golden Spike awards and allowed me to introduce the Achievement Program to others.

This journey continued when two other close railroad friends, Doug and Jim, visited The Train Exchange store while I was there. After chatting briefly, we noticed a young man pushing a walker and a female assistant behind him. After talking to the young man, Ryan, and life manager Rachel, she indicated that Ryan has had spina bifida from birth and has loved trains since he was small. Ryan visits a train setup in a mall every Saturday. She asked us three if we could build Ryan a train layout in one of the bedrooms in his home. After many meetings and measurements, we came up with a layout plan. This led to many challenges because of cost, his ability to run trains, materials, and track and train-related items. So, a call went out to our railroad community, and

we were overwhelmed by the response of donations we received. While planning his mountain, I wondered if there was an AP Volunteer for helping a physically disabled person. Bill Fassett, the AP Regional Manager, informed me that the Pacific Northwest Region had previously established a Public Service Committee to deal with projects that either create and maintain a long-term public model railroad layout or assist NMRA members with transitions in their modeling careers due to factors such as disability. Projects are approved at the Division level and then at the Region level. Once approved, members who carry out the projects are appointed to the Public Service Committee and earn TUs for membership on a regional committee. Ryan's project was approved, and I subsequently needed to document my time and efforts to receive credit for the committee service toward the Association Volunteer certificate. After two years, Ryan is still adding and making changes but is having fun running DCC trains on his layout.

This journey has helped me escape from day-to-day life and placed me in a "train world" for a few hours. I might be an engineer, contractor, landscaper, designer, electrician, or whatever project I was tackling at that time, but in seven or more years, I'm wearing fewer hats. We are nearing the completion of the Alberta Midland Railroad. Although a layout is never really done, I must thank my great friends who helped me through my journey: AP Division Manager Doug Burton, who kept me on track; Doug M, Jim M, and Bob K, who kept me going; and a special thanks to my lovely wife Marija, who lets me have my time in my train world. Thank you all so much for giving me the opportunity to go on this journey.

Certificates Earned
Dennis Dreher, MMR® #766

Master Builder – Scenery
Model Railroad Engineer – Civil
Model Railroad Engineer – Electrical
Master Builder – Structures
Master Builder – Cars
Chief Dispatcher
Association Volunteer